

Theories of Sexual Identity: Queer Theory and Beyond
SC 522 Spring 2007
Mondays 12-2:30

Instructor: Aimee Van Wagenen

Office: McGuinn Hall 409

Hours: Wednesday and Friday, 12-1 and by appointment

Phone/Voicemail: 617-552-4134

Email: vanwagea@bc.edu

Homepage: www2.bc.edu/~vanwagea

Course Description:

In this seminar, we explore both “the classics” in the interdisciplinary field of queer theory and “the beyond” in theories of sexual identity. We begin the course with the study of the history of queer theory through important foundational texts from thinkers such as Michel Foucault, Judith Butler and Eve Sedgwick. We consider the central themes in queer theory: the performativity of the sexual subject; the incoherence and inconsistency of the sex, desire, and gender; the challenge to sexual essentialism and resistance to fixity in identity; and the celebration of marginal and non-normative sexual practice.

In the later part of the course, we move beyond “the classics” to explore developments and variety in sociological understandings of queer theory. This later part of the course includes engagement with the cutting edge in empirical studies of sexual identity. Here we look at empirical works that draw from and further develop queer theory.

Required Texts

Butler, Judith. 2004. *Undoing Gender*. Routledge.

Carrillo, Héctor. 2002. *The Night is Young: Sexuality in Mexico in the Time of AIDS*. University of Chicago Press.

Foucault, Michel. 1990. *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*. Vintage Books.

Schippers, Mimi. 2002. *Rockin' out of the Box: Gender Maneuvering in Alternative Hard Rock*. Rutgers University Press.

Sedgwick, Eve. 1990. *Epistemology of the Closet*. University of California Press.

Sullivan, Nikki. 2003. *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*. New York University Press.

Surviving the Nian, A Musical. Performance at the Calderwood Theater, Boston (A Theater Offensive Production). Tentative date: April 19. Ticket price: TBA.

SC522 Coursepack 2007, for sale at bookstore.

These texts, including the Coursepack, are available on 2 hour reserve at the O'Neill library. All are available for purchase at the BC Bookstore. Many on-line booksellers will stock these texts; you may be able to find them for a considerable discount used on-line.

Reading Schedule

Topic 1: What is Queer Theory?

Week 1—Jan. 22

Social Construction & Normalization/Regulation 1

- Coursepack Reading 1: Weeks, Jeffrey. 1996 [1977]. “The Construction of Homosexuality.” Pp. 41-63 in *Queer Theory/Sociology*, edited by Steven Seidman.
- Chapter 1 in *CI*: “The Social Construction of Same-Sex Desire.”
- Chapter 2 in *UG*, “Gender Regulations.”

Week 2—Jan. 29

Normalization/Regulation 2: Saint Foucault

- Coursepack Reading 2: Connell, R.W. 1995. “Democracies of Pleasure: Thoughts on the Goals of Radical Sexual Politics.” Pp. 384-397 in *Social Postmodernism: Beyond Identity Politics*, edited by Linda Nicholson and Steven Seidman.
- Foucault, Michel. 1990. *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*.

Week 3—Feb. 5

Identity and the Self as Performance: Saint Judith

- Chapter 5 in *CI*: “Performance, Performativity, Parody, and Politics.”
- Coursepack Reading 3: Butler, Judith. 1991. “Imitation and Gender Subordination.” Pp. 13-31 in *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories: Gay Theories*, edited by Diana Fuss.
- Introduction and Chapter 1 in *UG*: “Acting in Concert” and “Beside Oneself.”

Week 4—Feb. 12

What is “Queer?”

- Coursepack Reading 4: Warner, Michael. 1991. “Fear of a Queer Planet.” *Social Text* 29: 3-17.
- Coursepack Reading 5: Duggan, Lisa. 1992. “Making it Perfectly Queer.” *Socialist Review* 22(1): 11-31.
- Sullivan, Nikki. 2003. Chapter 3 in *CI*: “Queer: A Question of Being or Doing.”

Week 5—Feb. 19

Binary Oppositions: Saint Eve

- Sedgwick, Eve. 1990. *Epistemology of the Closet*. University of California Press.

Week 6—Feb. 26

Queer Movements/Community/Transformation

- Coursepack Reading 6: Gamson, Joshua. 1995. “Must Identity Movements Self-Destruct? A Queer Dilemma.” *Social Problems* 42:390-407.
- Coursepack Reading 7: Gamson, Joshua. 1989. “Silence, Death, and the Invisible Enemy: AIDS Activism and Social Movement ‘Newness.’” *Social Problems* 38:351-67.
- Chapter 8 in *CI*: “Community and its Discontents.”
- Chapter 10 in *UG*: “The Question of Social Transformation.”

Week 7—Mar. 12

Psychoanalytic Theories

- Coursepack Reading 8: Fletcher, John. 1989. "Freud and his Uses: Psychoanalysis and Gay Theory." Pp. 90-118 in *Coming on Strong: Gay Politics and Culture*, edited by Simon Sheperd & Mick Wallis. London: Unwin Hyman.
- Chapter 10 and 11 in *CI*: "Fetishism(s) and the Politics of Perversion" and "Queering Popular Culture"
- In Class Presentation: Feature Film from Fox/Searchlight, *Boys Don't Cry* (1999)

Topic 2: Theorizing 'Other' Queers

Week 8—Mar. 19

The T & I of LGBTI

- Chapter 6 in *CI*: "Transsexual Empires and Transgender Warriors."
- Chapters 3 & 4 in *UG*: "Doing Justice to Someone" and "Undiagnosing Gender."
- Coursepack Reading 9: Sloop, John M. 2004. "Disciplining the Transgendered: Brandon Teena, Public Representation, and Normativity." Pp. 50-82 in *Disciplining Gender: Rhetorics of Sex Identity in Contemporary U.S. Culture*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.

Week 9—Mar. 26

Sadomasochism

- Chapter 9 in *CI*: "Sadomasochism as Resistance?"
- Coursepack Reading 10: Califa, Pat. 1994. "A Secret Side of Lesbian Sexuality" and "Genderbending: Playing Roles and Reversals." In *Public Sex: The Culture of Radical Sex*. Cleis Press.
- Coursepack Reading 11: Bersani, Leo. 1995. "The Gay Daddy." Pp. 77-112 in *Homos*. Harvard University Press.

Topic 3: Queer Theory in Ethnography

Week 10—April 2

Queer Straights

- Chapter 7 in *CI*: "Queering 'Straight' Sex."
- Schippers, Mimi. 2002. *Rockin' Out of the Box*.

Week 11—April 23

Queer Race

- Chapter 4 in *CI*: "Queer Race."
- Carillo, Héctor. 2002. *The Night is Young*

Topic 4: Critiques

Week 12—April 30

Critiques

- Coursepack Reading 12: Walters, Suzanna Danuta. 1996. "From Here to Queer: Radical Feminism, Postmodernism, and the Lesbian Menace (Or, Why Can't a Woman Be More like a Fag?)" *Signs* 21(4): 830-869.
- Coursepack Reading 13: Harstock, Nancy. 1990. "Foucault: A Theory for Women?" Pp. 157-175 in *Feminism/Postmodernism*, edited by Linda J. Nicholson. New York: Routledge.

Course Requirements

This is an advanced reading and writing seminar. All seminar participants are expected to attend all class meetings, to be able to set aside the necessary time to read and prepare for class each week, to come to class prepared to participate in class discussions and to periodically serve as a discussion leader. Your grade in the course will be based upon the following:

5 Reading Response Papers: 3-5 pages (10% each)

Submit these papers as you complete them. Seminar participants must turn in at least 2 of these papers by March 26. Seminar participants must turn in at least 2 additional papers (total of 4) by April 13. All 5 papers must be completed and turned in by May 2.

Discussion & Participation (20%)

Final Paper: 10-15 pages (30%)

This final paper is on a topic of your choosing, and should be explicitly related and connected to the themes and readings of the course. Midway through the semester, you should meet with me to discuss your paper. Each participant will also present their ideas in progress in class towards the end of the semester.